

Philippians (3:15-21)

Paul urges us to shun all appearances of human pride that seeks to displace Christ's righteousness with our own and (3:1-6) to keep looking ahead in our faith (3:7-14) by imitating genuine Christ-like examples (3:15-17) and avoiding those who are counterfeit (3:18-21).

I. Admonishment to Maturity (3:15-17)

A. *Maintain a Mature Mindset* (3:15)

1. This is Paul's second of three admonitions to use our minds for God's glory (2:5 = humility before others, see 4:8 = virtuous thoughts). In other words, what you think really matters!
2. Paul expects his readers to have the same attitude and forward focus as his (3:7-14), though this verse presumes that some in Philippi would not agree with him.
3. The road to maturity is marked by:
 - a) relying on Christ alone through faith alone (3:7-9)
 - b) experiencing God's power in suffering (3:10-11)
 - c) recognizing that perfection in this life is unattainable, hence
 - d) keeping a spotlight on our heavenly inheritance is paramount (3:12-14)
4. "All of us who are mature" is a gentle way of stating that *every* believer is called to this measure of maturity; it's not for apostles/clergy alone. "Christians should never be satisfied with yesterday's grace" (Carson, *Philippians*, p. 89). Our progress in the faith must be evident to others (1 Tim. 4:15).
5. Those who are immature in these areas should listen to God's voice (3:15b); "that too God will make clear to you" is a curious expression.
 - a) Paul insists that if doubt exists, it is *God* who removes uncertainty (*ἀποκαλύψει* and its derivatives is, in every case, used of God's activity and not human, cf. Mt. 16:17; Eph. 1:17).
 - b) Paul does not say *how* God will clarify, but he does say *that* God will do so. We desperately need God to enlighten us with fresh ways of viewing old truths so new habits are etched into our lives.
 - c) Matters Paul expects God to clarify are those he's just mentioned (see 4. a-c above). Paul is saying that, as a matter of normality, all believers are to be constantly growing in these matters. It is sad and shameful to hear believers claim not to have grown in their faith or knowledge.

B. *Be Responsible with the Knowledge You Have* (3:16)

1. This verse implicitly states that there are no excuses for not growing. Every believer should have a basic knowledge of humility in serving others and the understanding that steadfastness in the faith is a necessity. Not to order our lives after this knowledge, given sufficient time, would be nothing short of sin (see Heb. 5:12-6:2 for a clear rebuke of immature believers).
2. That all believers are responsible for growth is echoed in Jesus' teaching on stewardship. Every believer would do well to pay close attention to the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-27; see also, Mt. 7:15-27). Principles to be gleaned include:
 - a) Not everyone has the same amount of spiritual resources, but all are expected to do their best with what the Master gives.
 - b) Wise stewardship involves investment (material resources simply serve to flesh out the story; Jesus is *not* teaching us about financial matters *per se*).
 - c) Wise stewardship brings greater responsibility and privilege, while poor stewardship ultimately leads to eternal tragedy. "To make no commitments on religious matters is really to make a damning commitment by default" (see Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, pp. 372-375).

C. *Imitate Mature Believers* (3:17)

1. It is not arrogant to presume that disciples should think like we do, since the grand caveat is to follow us *as we follow Christ* (1 Cor. 11:1).
2. Note also that Paul includes others as well as himself.
3. Elsewhere Paul commends imitating others who live a godly life (4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6-7; 2 Thess. 3:6-8).

4. The specific manner of modeling Paul has in mind here includes renouncing all self-made righteousness and throwing off all complacency by looking ahead to the glorious reward of heaven.

II. Avoid Libertarians and Their Licentiousness (3:18-19)

“Following” Paul’s example (*περιπατοῦντας*) entails avoiding those who “live” (*περιπατοῦσιν*) as enemies of the cross.

A. Who Are These People (v. 18)?

1. Professed Christians whose way of life is contrary to Christian principles of holiness (Note: Paul does not refer to their teaching, but to their lifestyle). They are self-indulgent antinomians who understand God’s grace as a license to live in whatever manner they choose (see Rom. 6:1).
2. Those who deliberately indulge in those activities which Scripture explicitly forbids undermine the power and purpose of the cross (Rom. 6:7). God takes our sanctification seriously and so should we.
3. “Enemies of the cross” is a generic term that sums up their overall character and fate described in four phrases:
 - a) “Their destiny is destruction” – the final outcome is eternal separation from the living God. For those who claimed perfection (*τετελείωμαι*, 3:12) in this life and saw it as opportunity to live a life of immorality, Paul declares their real destiny (*τέλος*) is destruction.
 - b) “Their god is their stomach” – the sensual, appetitive nature becomes the object of worship; this is all-out hedonism (Rom. 16:17-18 for the same warning against such people)
 - c) “Their glory is in their shame” – boasting in freedom from all moral restraint is utterly shameful (see 1 Cor. 6:12-13).
 - d) “Their mind is on earthly things” – those who abandon the heavenly prize (3:14) for the pleasures of this world will find themselves ultimately abandoned by God. Take note of those who claim to love God, but whose lives reflect a greater love for this world (1 Jn. 2:15-19).

B. By Maintaining a Fixed Focus on Your Destiny (3:20)

1. The primary means whereby believers can escape worldly snares is by deliberately remembering our heavenly citizenship.
2. Our belonging comes from God and every believer is *presently* a heavenly citizen (note the present *ὑπάρχει*). The importance of this includes:
 - a) Our allegiance must forever be to the heavenly city (Heb. 11:10, 16). “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14).
 - b) As members of God’s household, we live here as aliens and strangers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pt. 1:1, 17, 2:11).
 - c) Although the presence of Jesus is extended to the courts of heaven, he is coming back someday and “everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3).

C. By Maintaining a Fixed Focus on Your Future Transformation (3:21)

1. Just as we “are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” in our being by God’s Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:16), so too our complete transformation will occur when Jesus returns.
2. The inner being (soul or immaterial self) has already been raised from death to new life (Col. 2:12). However, the outer being (body or material self) will someday be raised to new life.
3. Paul believed that Christ’s resurrected body was a paradigm for all believers. 1 Cor. 15:42-44 lists four essential differences between an earthly body and Christ’s resurrected body:

Human Body	Resurrected Body
Perishable	imperishable
dishonorable	glorious
weak	powerful
fleshly/natural	spiritual

4. The final transformation of the whole person marks the end of all human suffering, sin, and sickness and ushers in the beginning of profound delight and paradise for eternity.